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THE LILIES OF THE FIELD

(Extract from the lecture by Dr. Ephraim Ha Reubeni on "New Light on the Flora of the Old and New Testaments," given before the Club December 9, 1924. Translated from the Hebrew by David de Sola Pool.)

It may be interesting to turn our attention for a moment to the most famous of the plants of the New Testament, the lilies of the field, *Krinon Agrion*, mentioned in Matthew VI, 28, and Luke XII, 27. In the parable, Jesus says that "Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass in the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven"

What actually is the plant referred to?

Many varying answers have been given to this question. L. Fonck,* in his "Streifzüge durch die Biblische Flora" thinks that it is the *Lilium candidum*. But this is not found at all in Palestine and one would have to go to the Lebanon to find it. Furthermore, the *Lilium candidum* is not the Greek *krinon* but the *leuiron*. Tristram† in his "Natural History of the Bible" is of the opinion that it is the *Anemone coronaria*.

But this plant is not thrown into the oven.

Others think it to be *Ranunculus asiaticus*. Post‡ proposes the *Gladiolus*. Kitto§ suggests the *Lotus*, while others propose the *Crocus*, the *Colchicum*, the *Tulipa praecox*, the *Iris*, the *Lilium Martagon* and the *Lilium cephalodonium*. P. Souciet¶ in his "Recueil de dissertations critiques sur les endroits difficiles dans l'Écriture sainte" is of opinion that it is the *Fritillaria imperialis*. But this also is not in keeping with the phrase "and tomorrow it is cast into the oven."

In view of all these doubts and uncertainties some, therefore, feel that in these words Jesus was not referring to any specific plant but to the plants of the field in general. But anyone reading this in its plain sense must realize that here the reference is to some specific plant which grows abundantly, to which Jesus could point and which his hearers would recognize for its outstanding beauty. In my opinion, scholars have strayed very far afield from a correct solution to this problem. They have not proceeded from a correct conception of the question involved. They have looked for a plant outstanding in size and color.|| Many of them have demanded that it be a plant with red or purple coloring, because, in their opinion, King Solomon was robed in regal purple.

But it seems to me that a more refined taste gets more aesthetic

* FONCK, LEOPOLD. Streifzüge durch die Biblische Flora. Fribourg, 1900. pp. 53-77.

† TRISTRAM, HENRY B. The natural history of the Bible. London. 1889. p. 464.

‡ POST, GEORGE, E. Flora of Syria, Palestine and Sinai. Beirut. p. 773.

§ KITTO, J. A cyclopedia of biblical literature. 3rd Ed. London. 1886. Vol. 3. p. 845.

¶ SOUCIET, P. Recueil de dissertations difficiles de l'Écriture Sainte. Paris. 1715. pp. 158, 9.

|| LEVESQUE, E. Dictionnaire de la Bible de F. Vigourant. Vol. 55. p. 283.

satisfaction in the beauty of less violent colors, and in a plant which is not necessarily strongly assertive and springing to the eyes of every beholder. I am of opinion that this was the taste of the Jews of old and that this was the taste of Jesus. Jesus' own words "And I say unto you" which occur so frequently in Matthew and Luke, would seem to bear this out. These words "And I say unto you" spoken of the *Krinson Agrion* would indicate that this plant had a special beauty all its own which was not so readily obvious to the masses, and that Jesus was calling attention to it as would a poet revealing an unexpected beauty.

On the background of this conception of the verse I believe we can find the correct interpretation of the "Lilies of the Field." Let us remember the words of the following verse, "If God so clothe the grass in the field," to which insufficient attention has been paid. The *Krinson Agrion*, whatever it is, has to be of the general character of grass. We cannot assume that the phrase "grass in the field" is only a figurative expression, for this is not in keeping with Hebrew style.

What then is the solution of the problem? Among the most ancient translations of *Krinson Agrion* is that of Dioscorides who translates it ABIB-LABON. This is an ancient Hebrew name which has been forgotten for two thousand years. From the linguistic point of view on the one side as well as from the point of view of nature, from the aesthetic conception involved, from the term grass, the phrase about throwing into the oven—from all these considerations we suggest with considerable confidence that the "lily of the field" is the *Anthemis Palestina*.

In ancient Hebrew, Abib-Labon, which is Dioscorides' translation of *Krinson Agrion*, means white flower. I have learned from the mouth of the Bedouin in the district south of Gaza that they call the *Anthemis*, HANUN ABIAD, which is the Arabic for white flower. These Bedouin have lived far from foreign influences, and have preserved the ancient name of this plant.

The *Krinson Agrion* is therefore, for all these reasons, not the Lily of the Field nor any other of the flowers with which it has been indentified, but is the simple *Anthemis* or daisy. The daisy suits all the conditions demanded by the parable. It is neither red nor purple but is beautiful with a modest and delicate beauty of its own. It is beautiful at all hours of the day. It is beautiful

at every period of its growth, even when it is old and even when it is drying. When it has dried up it is gathered together with the dried grass and cast into the furnace.

Its delicate beauty, and this, its ultimate fate, suggested to Jesus the thought of his parable, and he points out as something which the ordinary observer would not readily see, "yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven"

Let us remember also that the daisy has a crown, which gives special aptitude to the comparison with Solomon, the crowned king. The words "the grass in the field" are surely and naturally applicable to the *Anthemis* which grows like grass in Palestine. The beauty of the *Anthemis* and its crown are particularly noticeable in the morning's early dawn.

Can we not imagine that the thoughts and emotions which surged in Jesus did not always allow him easy sleep, that they awakened him at the dawn, that he went out in the fields among the hills walking in the early morning light over these fields of the delicate *Anthemis* with its simple crowned beauty, and that on some such morning there was born in the heart of Jesus this beautiful parable?

A NEW VARNISH-LEAF TREE FROM THE FLORIDA KEYS

JOHN K. SMALL.

Two species of *Dodonaea* have heretofore been known to grow in Florida. However, these were generally misinterpreted until well within this century. A large-leaved kind—*Dodonaea viscosa*—is rather rare on the coasts of the peninsula, while a smaller-leaved shrub—*D. jamaicensis*—grows both in the coastal regions and in the interior. Several years ago a third species was discovered on Big Pine Key. It was provisionally referred to the West Indian *D. Ehrenbergii**. Recent studies show that it is not referable to any tropical American species and indicate that the Florida Key plant has not yet been described. It may be named and described as:

* Journal of the New York Botanical Garden 22: 50. 1921.